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"HERE THE SKY IS BLUE": ECHOES OF EUROPEAN ART MOVEMENTS IN VERNACULAR POET JIBANANANDA DAS

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on Vernacular poet Jibanananda Das's unique use of colour in his poetry to create images unique to Bengali Literature. The use of colour also makes his poems distinct as being a poet of Hemanta (Autumn), we find frequent use of grey, a shade traditionally associated with the season. A play of Light and Darkness makes some of his poems more of a painting/picture. Tagore had identified t this quality Chitra-rupamoy (like a picture) in his poem Mrityur Aage/Before Death. The play of sunlight on the grass and the moonlight in the meadows and trees echo certain tenets of Impressionism in art. Jibanananda names a few famous painters, but his literary notes /Dinlipi or motley collection of prose do not belie any fascination with painters. The unique similes and metaphors associated with colour make Jibanananda a poet who used this vehicle as a medium to create a new poetic consciousness.

KEYWORDS: *Impressionism, Pre -Raphaelites, Light and Darkness, Ophelia*

INTRODUCTION

Impressionism was mainly a 19th-century art movement characterized by a focus on the accurate depiction of Light in its changing qualities (often accentuating the effects of the passage of Time), ordinary subject matter, unusual visual angles, and the inclusion of movement as a crucial element of human perception and experience. 'The Impressionists wanted to achieve the brightness of sunlight on their canvasses…..colour and light were to create shape and space.' Jibanananda uses this technique to maximum effect-

The orange hue appears in the sky in the evening,

The crows appear blue. Bengal the Beautiful (My translation).

As mentioned earlier, Jibanananda was not an ardent art enthusiast, yet he remembers the Great Impressionist Masters as such (Chakororty186)-

On the damp walls full of cracks and cockroaches…

Hang numerous framed pictures of Anuradhapura-Ellora;

Matisse-Cezanne-Picasso;

Or which picture? Picture of what bones? (My Translation) *Aborodh, Bela Obela Kaalbela*

In another poem- I

keep looking….

Like a picture of Gauguin…*Sristir Tire*/On the Shores of Creation

Jibanananda uses the three shades – grey, yellow and golden hues to describe his favourite season, Autumn. Van Gogh had painted his house yellow to welcome his friend Gauguin because "to his eyes yellow was a symbol of life" Likewise, Jibanananda had found significance in the shade "yellow" while deliberating upon Autumn.

Jibanananda's depiction of Light, sometimes completely contrasting colours, bears a resemblance to impressionist painters- Monet, Cezanne, Renoir- "Silvery Night," "The Peacock Blue of The Sky," and "The blue of Midnight." But why the influence of Western painting traditions? Perhaps the answer can be found in Rabindranath's "*Chele Bhulano Chora*"/Rhymes for Children, where he observes that when there are images in language, one feels like drawing them, but where are the painters in our country who draw them, keeping the aesthetics intact? In a letter to Rabindranath, Jibanananda writes, " …the blue colour of the sky, the green colour of the Earth, the white colour of light or the black colour of darkness- all colours have uniqueness and attraction. All this Light, Darkness, and greenness of the Earth are beautiful. Therefore, I think judging beauty and eternity is a little different (Basu13-14)

The Nature that Jibanananda illustrates is the archetypal rural landscape of Bengal in a surrealistic shade of bold strokes. Jibanananda identified this confounded milieu's indeterminate situation and articulated the same inappropriate images with 'grey' undertones. His poems offer a canvas of riotous colors and link language with colours, a poem as vibrant as a painting. Majumder explicates this "surreal feature" in detail in his essay Jibananandaer Paravastab (The Surreal in Jibanananda) :

"Our familiar consciousness is shaken by the method with which Jibanananda has assembled' huge palm tree,' 'golden spear of the sun, "warm and red meat of a deer,' in the Light and shade are created by the surreal.(Bhattacharya) These images capture colours minutely. In this respect, the imagery of Jibanananada is as authentic as a painting- the exact shade of leaves yellow, red and green. In some poems and the play of Sunlight carry echoes of Impressionist echoes.

Another set of images explore colours in Nature which are congruous with the poet's o unique perception-"sad green shore of Bengal" Beautiful soft green dead Diwali fly" "Beautiful cold green dead Diwali fly" "The vast sky glowed like in the moonlight like the bright leopardskin stole, "Heaps of grain like a ladder of gold".

Sisir Kumar Das tries to form an association between Jibanananda's poetics and his incongruous use in his introduction to A Certain Sense: Poems by Jibanananda Das, an anthology of the poet's translated poems:

His poems offer a canvas filled with a riotous mishmash of incongruent colours defying the conventional logic of a normative visual experience. He more often responds to the social anarchy of his age, creating an anomaly of senseperceptions achieved through a chaos of colour and odour. His aesthetics frequently seems the aesthetics of incongruous, and he nears the ideal of the surrealist painters in the portrayal of the culturally rich imaginary world created in his poems., (Das 11)

The Emergence of "Light" and 'Darkness" as Symbols

The use of colour, more specifically Sunlight and Darkness, play an essential role in Jibanananda's poems; these colours graduate from mere picture images to symbols. Symbols of light-Sunlight, Moonlight, and the absence of Light, i.e., Darkness, have connotations of Life and Death. The critical observation here is that Darkness, traditionally associated with Death in some poems, assumes positive significance- 'delicious, Darkness," as he describes it.

In the same way, sunlight associated with life and rejuvenation assumes a connotation of Death in *Shikar*/The Hunt and *Campe*/In the Camp-both poems describe the dead deer against a backdrop of sunlight. Just as an artist's palette creates new colours by mixing the familiar sunlight, Darkness yields negative and positive connotations in terms of meaning. In addition, it sometimes heightens the visual power of a particular image.

Some instances where Light and Darkness assume the symbolic significance of Life and Death are as follows-

- Sajina flowers like Aswins's autumn night…

  The **sunshine**, Time and Time, wrings her sleek golden hair…*Ekhane Akash Nil*/Here the sky is blue (Trns Choudhuri 4)

- The kite wipes of the scent of **sunlight from its wings**

  The Earth's colours all quenched...(Banalata Sen trns Chaudhuri 15)

- The world is filled this daybreak

  With soft green Light, like tender lemon leaves: (Ghas/Grass trns Majumdar 17)

- Tomorrow the doe will return, In the morning light, she will be seen-

  All her dead lovers strewn by her side. *Campe*/In the Camp (trnsHalder10)

- In the **spring moonlight** we, we are like all those dead stags. *Campe*/In the Camp (trns Halder10)

- A **strange darkness** has come to the Earth today.

  Those who are blind see most with their eyes:

  Jackals and vultures feed on their hearts now. *Adbhut Andhra Ek*/A Strange Darkness (trns Chakravarty 88)

- Through **Light and dark**, I go—within my head

  There works—not a dream, rather a certain sense *Bodh*/A certain sense (trns Chaudhuri)

The play of Light and Darkness, in all these lines, defamiliarises the conventional rural landscape of Bengal and creates images which are unique. The central image in some of his poems, and the one wherein we find an example of the colours in Nature perceived by Jibanananda, perform a two-fold function. The vivid colours create a new, exotic image and, in a few cases, become symbols that recur. Furthermore, Jibanananda consciously defamiliarizes traditional associations of these symbols, creating a new world of symbol meaning. For example, sunlight associated with hope and beauty often assumes an ominous appearance -in the poem *Shikar*/The Hunt we perceive dawn where the elements of Nature are enchanted by the rising Sun-suddenly a deer is shot and killed.

The season of Autumn, an essential symbol for Jibanananda and traditionally associated with greyness and decay

assume a positive significance. On the other hand, Light and Darkness, with their associations with yellow and black, are often interchangeable in terms of symbolic interpretation. The naming of *Dhusar Pandulipi*/The Grey Manuscript in 1936 was Jibanananda's statement of his fascination with colour and a hint of incomprehensibility associated with grey. Indeed, the irrefutable appearance of Jibanananda as the leading Bengali poet after Tagore materializes owing to his poetic attempts to locate areas of greyness and the 'in-between' spaces in essential Bengali culture and expression.(Roy 193)

Depiction of Intense and Vivid Colours of Nature: Echo of the Pre-Raphaelites

The Pre-Raphaelite painters and poets placed great importance on depicting Nature with accuracy. The use of colour in paintings and poems marks a natural and vivid approach. In his epic poem, “The Earthly Paradise” William Morris equates colour and food-

The matters of their cheer between:

Slices of white cheese, specked with green,

And green striped onions and ryebread,

And summer apples faintly red,

Even beneath the crimson skin;

And yellow grapes, well ripe and thin,

Plucked from the cottage gable-end.(Herbert 446)

In this poem, we do not have to look for colour. Instead, it is intrinsically linked to the poem through the description of vegetables (food). Morris's poems Golden Wings, My Sister's Sleep, the Patriot, and The Blessed Damozel are all products of such innovation in the description through the use of colour. (Samanta 3)

In "Golden Wings," the old fort is described as such –

Many scarlet bricks there were

In its walls, and the old grey stones

Over which the red apples stone

At the right Time of the year (Ford 368)

We observe these traits in Jibanananda’s poems as well-"Great dark wings [Vultures) "brick -brown horse," sea of blue wind," "the green grass like unripe grapefruit," 'arnatoo red sunlight" Myna's brown wings" 'sea of blue wind," "the kite's golden wing turned brown."

I have noted a unique phenomenon in Jibanananda's poem 'Shob'-against a backdrop of serene and resplendent elements of Nature "where the lone river's deep beauty'…..' starry night's dark' 'Reddish clouds and 'yellow moonlight' suddenly in the corpse of Mrinalini Ghosal appears floating. "blue, red, silver in perfect harmony with the surroundings.

Earth's other river: this river indeed

Is of reddish clouds-yellow moonlight if you only heed All

other Light and Darkness here withdraw:

Red blue fish clouds -the moon's light pale blue

Shines here; here, Mrinalini Ghosal's body

Floats forever; blue red. silver silently. Shob/Corpse (trns Lal 46)

In the context of presentation of Death amidst a serene natural backdrop *Shob* bears an uncanny resemblance to Ophelia by the Pre- Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais. In the painting, the corpse of Ophelia floats amidst a riot of colours -all symbolic in their connotations.

Sir John Everett Millais's portrait Ophelia is considered a great masterpiece of the Pre-Raphaelite style. Combining his interest in Shakespearean subjects with intense attention to natural detail, Millais created a powerful and memorable image. Most of the flowers in Ophelia are included either because they are mentioned in the play or for their symbolic value. Millais illustrates the dead and broken leaves and the flowers in full bloom. (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-ophelia-n01506-)

The scene depicted is from Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act IV, Scene vii, in which Ophelia, driven out of her mind when her father is murdered by her lover Hamlet, falls into a stream and drowns:

There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds

Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;

When down her weedy trophies and herself

Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,

And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up

The figure of Ophelia floats in the water, her midsection beginning to sink. Clothed in an antique dress, her hands are in the pose of submission, accepting of her fate. Various summer flowers and other botanicals surround her, some explicitly described in the text, while others for their symbolic meaning. The ring of violets around Ophelia's neck symbolizes faithfulness but can also refer to chastity and Death.

And in Jibanananda-

Earth's other river: this river indeed

Is of reddish clouds-yellow moonlight if you only heed All

other Light and Darkness here withdraw:

Red blue fish clouds -the moon's light pale blue

Shines here; here, Mrinalini Ghosal's body

Floats forever; blue red. silver silently. *Shob*/Corpse

The same approach is observed in the poem Hunt/ Shikar where it is "Dawn' and 'Forest and sky from all around /Gleam like the peacock's green-blue wings' 'the beautiful nut brown deer" has come out in the morning light'-suddenly 'A strange sound'-'A fire burns again- the deer's warm -red meat is almost ready. This violent act of shooting the deer is easily merged with the commonplace details of regular deer- hunt-where the hunters' some well -oiled human heads' share stories after -'Many old dew-moist stories are told/Sitting on the grassy bed under the stars.

CONCLUSION

Minute attention to colours in Nature and presentation of such in vivid and precise form make some of Jibanananda's poems a visual delight. Then there is the unique quality of qualifying images in several colors-green, aromatic grass, dry grass, yellow grass, bluish grass, and damp grass. (Sinha 34) Indeed, to a large extent, Jibanananda's perception of Nature is based on his unique ability to portray Nature as skilfully as a painter. Poet and critic Buddhadeb Bose observed aptly (after the publication of Jhora Palok /Fallen Feathers, Dhusar Pandulipi/Grey Manuscripts, and Bonolota Sen), "Jibanananda's world (of poetry) is almost entirely is almost entirely a visual world. "The subsequent publication of Bengal the Beautiful reiterates this statement. Finally, with his unique perception of the symbolic significance of Light and Darkness, Jibanananda creates a defamiliarized landscape of Bengal and a new order of distinctive images.

ENDNOTES

- Impressionism originated with a group of Paris-based artists whose independent exhibitions brought them to prominence during the 1870s and 1880s. The name of the style derives from the title of a Claude Monet work, Impression, Soleil levant (Impression, Sunrise),
- Henri Émile Benoît Matisse December 31 1869 – November 3 1954) was a French visual artist known for his use of colour and his fluid and original draughtsmanship. He was a draughtsman, printmaker, and sculptor but is known primarily as a painter
- Paul Cézanne January 19, 1839 – October 22, 1906) was a French artist and Post-Impressionist painter. Cézanne is said to have formed the bridge between late 19th-century Impressionism and early 20th-century Cubism.
- Eugène Henri Paul Gauguin June 7, 1848 – May 8, 1903) - French Post-Impressionist artist. Gauguin is recognized for the experimental use of color and Synthesis style that was distinct from Impressionism.
- Pierre-Auguste Renoir February 25, 1841 – December 3, 1919)- a French artist who was a leading painter in the emergence of the Impressionist style. As a celebrator of beauty and incredibly feminine sensuality.
- Ellora is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra, India. It is one of the world's largest rock-cut Hindu temple cave complexes, with artwork dating from 600–1000 CE.[1][2] Cave 16 features the world's most extensive single monolithic rock excavation, the Kailash temple, a chariot-shaped monument dedicated to the god Shiva. The Kailash temple excavation also features sculptures depicting various Hindu deities and relief panels summarizing the two major Hindu epics.
- The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (later known as the Pre-Raphaelites) was a group of English painters, poets, and art critics, founded in 1848 by William Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Michael Rossetti; the group sought a return to the abundant detail, intense colours, and complex compositions of Quattrocento Italian art. The Brotherhood's early doctrines were stated in four declarations: to have genuine ideas to express; to study Nature attentively to know how to express them; to sympathize with what is direct and profound and heartfelt in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote; and most importantly, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.

- William Morris (24 March 1834 – 3 October 1896) was a British textile designer, poet, artist, novelist, architectural conservationist, printer, translator and socialist activist associated with the British Arts and Crafts Movement. He was a major contributor to the revival of traditional British textile arts and methods of production. His literary contributions helped to establish the modern fantasy genre, while he helped win acceptance of socialism in fin de siècle Great Britain.
- Sir John Everett Millais (June 8, 1829 – August 13, 1896) - English painter and illustrator and one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Millais became the most famous exponent of their style.

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"Why I Write"; Corresponding Elements in the Poetic Discourse of Jibanananda and Wordsworth,

Till Death Do Us Part": Vernacular Poet Jibanananda Das's Notion of Death Consciousness and Influence on Later Poets.

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